



FRONT PAGE	SOUTH JERSEY NEWS	SPORTS	ENTERTAINMENT	CLASSIFIEDS	JOB	CARS	HOMES	SHOPPING
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Featured

Tuesday, June 21, 2005

Past Issues -

SOUTH JERSEY

Lawmakers demand answers about VX spill

Tuesday, June 21, 2005

June 10 Indiana accident raises fresh concerns about byproduct

By JIM WALSH
Courier-Post Staff

A recent spill of deadly nerve agent at an Army base in Indiana raises new questions about a plan to ship a byproduct of the poison to South Jersey, two federal legislators say.

But an Army spokeswoman said the June 10 accident, which caused no injuries, shows the extensive safety measures used for handling VX, a Cold War-era chemical weapon.

Sen. Jon Corzine, D-Hoboken, and U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews, D-Haddon Heights, today are to call on the Army to release more details about the spill at the Newport Chemical Depot.

"The question now becomes, 'Can the Army load and ship (VX) without further incident?'" said Corzine spokesman Anthony Coley.

The Army, which is destroying VX stored in Indiana, plans to ship wastewater byproduct to a DuPont Inc. plant in Salem County.

The byproduct would be dumped into the Delaware River under the plan. No contracts, however, have been signed at this point.

About 30 gallons of VX, which has the consistency of motor oil, spilled when valves malfunctioned during the destruction process, said Terry Arthur, a depot spokeswoman. The spill has been cleaned and the valves repaired, but the treatment process remains on hold for a previously scheduled review, she said.

VX destruction is expected to resume later this week. Arthur said the Army has destroyed about 3,000 gallons of VX since the process began May 5.

"We know how dangerous VX is," said Arthur, who said safety measures limited the spill's extent and prevented contact with humans. "Everything we do is very deliberate."

DuPont spokesman Anthony Farina said his firm does not expect the treated byproduct to pose a hazard. "We will not accept one drop of waste water if there were any detectable agent in it," he said.

He also said DuPont is working to address environmental concerns raised in March in a study

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by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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